



Fatimah, Mary and the Divine Feminine in Islam

At the very core of Islamic philosophy there is evidence of what can be called a vision of the Motherhood of God.

In the first Sura of the Koran, the Fatiha that is recited by millions of Muslims in their daily devotions, God is called Al Rahmin, the merciful and compassionate one. "Ramin" is derived from the Arabic for "womb" or "matrix", mercy is also a feminine attribute, and so Muslims are reminded that God can be either woman or man. Every day God is compared to a mother and woman.

While the Muslim vision is often perceived to be authoritarian and punitive the Koran, on close inspection, is filled with descriptions and vision of God's more feminine attributes such as gentleness, providence, love, universal compassion and tender-heartedness.

Muhammad was himself a living example of the Divine's infinite capacity for forgiveness: many times he forgave enemies who had committed unspeakable atrocities against him and his brethren.

The religious intolerance that characterises the behaviour of many Muslim communities today is inconsistent with the heritage of tolerance that is professed by the Islamic tradition. For example, the Koran clearly states in several passages that any person who lives a life of holy reverence is welcomed into paradise regardless of their religion. Muhammad openly praises both Judaism (Abraham is deeply respected within the Koran) and Christianity (Muhammad frequently praises Jesus and Mary in the Koran).

Even more surprising is the Koran's reverence for Mary, mother of Christ. Muhammad (and also in later Islamic theological scriptures) regarded Mary as the most marvellous of all women, a high adept and living example of the pure and holy life. Later Koranic commentaries describe Mary as an intervening force between God (Allah) and humanity. This intervening force is characterised by Allah's mercy, forgiveness, sweetness and humility- the embodiment of Allah's love for creation.

When Muhammad retook Mecca he began a programme of removing the pagan influences from the Kaaba, the most holy of Muslim sites. He removed many frescoes and images that he considered inauspicious but he specifically left on the walls a fresco of the Virgin Mary and her child.

In one of the most powerful Hadiths (prophetic sayings of Muhammad) it is reported that Muhammad said, "Paradise is at the feet of the Mother". Does this suggest that the feminine aspect of God is an important and essential pathway to the attainment of supreme consciousness?

Muhammad's peak defining experience, called the Meraj, saw him elevated through the seven heavens to the realm of God Almighty at the resplendent Sidrath where he communed with God, received his divine visions and instructions and was placed on the inexorable course of his life-mission to establish Islam. Muhammad was escorted by the archangel Gabriel (a masculine force) but the vehicle upon which Muhammad rode was the beautiful "Buraq". The Buraq was a white horse with wings and the face of a woman! Clearly suggesting that the great power by which Muhammad was elevated to the level of supreme consciousness was ultimately feminine in nature! Some scholars say that the Buraq is an Islamic symbol of the Kundalini, a force that Eastern Yogis describe as the Goddess or Divine Mother.

Fatimah is another prominent female in the Islamic tradition. Muhammad revered Fatimah as if she were a divine being, saying "Allah, The Most High; is pleased when Fatimah is pleased. He is angered; whenever Fatimah is angered!"

Whenever Fatimah would go to the house of Muhammad, he would stand up out of respect for her and honour her by giving her a special place to seat herself in his house. He regarded her as a sort of primordial woman, a symbol of divine womanhood giving her many holy names, such as: Siddiqah; The Honest, The Righteous; Al-Batool, Pure Virgin; Al-Mubarakah, The Blessed One; Al-Tahirah, The Virtuous, The Pure, Al-Zakiyah ;The Chaste, The Unblemished ;Al-Radhiyatul Mardhiah, She who is gratified and who shall be satisfied; Al-Muhaddathah, A person other than a Prophet, that the angels speak to; Al-Zahra, The Splendid; Al-Zahirah, The Luminous.

Shias revere the person of Fatimah, Muhammad's daughter and mother of the line of inspired imams who embodied the divine truth for their generation. As such, Fatimah is associated with Sophia, the divine wisdom, which gives birth to all knowledge of God. She has thus become another symbolic equivalent of the Great Mother.

Sunni Islam has also drawn inspiration from the female. The philosopher Muid ad-Din ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) saw a young girl in Mecca surrounded by light and realised that, for him, she was an incarnation of the divine Sophia. He believed that women were the most potent icons of the sacred, because they inspired a love in men which must ultimately be directed to God, the only true object of love.

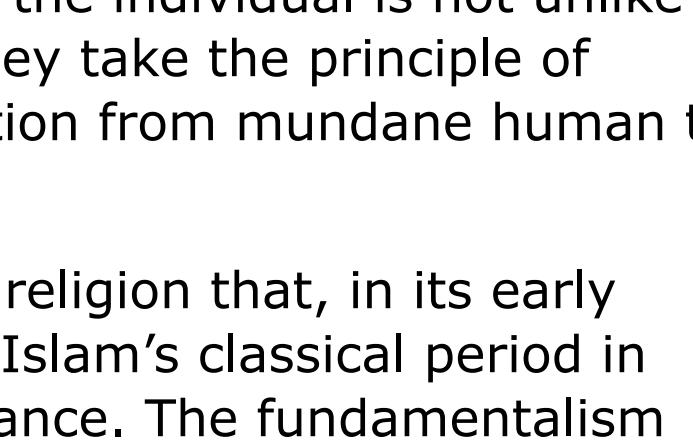
More generally speaking Muslims are reminded in the Koran that humans can experience and speak about God only in symbols.

Everything in the world is a sign (aya) of God; so women can also be a revelation of the divine. Ibn al-Arabi argued that humans have a duty to create theophanies for themselves, by means of the creative

imagination that pierces the imperfect exterior of mundane reality and

glimpses the divine within. The faculty of imagination is commonly

associated with the Divine Feminine.



While official Islam may not consistently describe the role of the Divine Feminine, this principle has been described and explored at length in the more esoteric Islamic tradition of Sufism. Sufism emphasises

passionate, mystical adoration of God. Many Sufis (and other mystics in other religions) seek a

spiritual union between themselves and the divine principle not unlike that between a child (the Sufi) and his mother (God) or a bride (Sufi) and the husband (God).

The Sufi poetry teaches the feminine qualities of joy, love, tenderness and self sacrifice on a path of true knowledge derived from the spiritual heart. The spiritual rebirth of the individual is not unlike the trial and tribulation of physical childbirth, according to the Sufis. They take the principle of divine love and use it to facilitate the process of alchemical transformation from mundane human to spiritual being.

The fanaticism that we see in modern Islam is a new development in a religion that, in its early history, was famous for its tolerance and respect for other religions. In Islam's classical period in medieval Spain and Egypt perhaps only Buddhism rivalled Islam's tolerance. The fundamentalism that characterises the behaviour of many of today's Muslims is in fact anti-Koranic.

A Sufi Ode to the Divine Mother

On the face of the earth there is no one more beautiful than You

Wherever I go I wear your image in my heart

Whenever I fall in a despondent mood I remember your image

And my spirit rises a thousand fold

Your advent is the blossom time of the Universe

O Mother you have showered your choicest blessings upon me

Also remember me on the Day of Judgement

I don't know if I will go to heaven or hell

But wherever I go, please always abide in me.